THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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atement of the urposes of the C. E. A.

The College English Association an organization of the teachers English in American Colleges consider their common probs. Until the Association was nded no adequate provision had n made for this large and keen-interested group to discuss the ny aspects of their profession. Association may be justly racterized as a guild whose mbers are drawn from the ac- teachers of English at the col- e level. The interests of the ociation are distinct from those the Modern Language Associa-, with which group the English ociation meets annually, but the rests of the two groups are in sense mutually exclusive. The dern Language Association, in- d, began its existence as a up of teachers of English who to discuss problems of teach- and scholarship. In recent years has devoted itself exclusive- o the scholarly purposes of the fession. It is to fulfill the need t the founders of the Modern guage Association felt in the inning that the College English ociation is now established. Its tion to the parent association is logous to that of the associa- s of the teachers of French, man, Spanish, and Slavonic. chief advantage of our or- ization is that its members very much on the firing and are able to report the gress of the battle from a view first hand. In other words, the her fresh from the classroom the sharpest conception of the ctiveness of the subject he hes, and of the teacher and the ght. It is in the class-room that s are tried out and proved. The her, moreover, has a knowledge first-hand of the changing val- in the minds of the young. The ng movement now evident in erican colleges to regard Eng- and American literature as ks of fine art, and not as as- ts of social activity, or docu- nts of cultural history (though y may be that as well), ought receive the encouragement of College English Association, ought to be watched with the nest interest by all teachers of subject. Moreover, the new cedures in the teaching of writ- in the colleges ought to be in- cted and their results assayed. College English Association ht to provide a most hospitable come for new ideas of all sorts hey are related to the teaching English. Here are only a few gestions towards the usefulness the Association; anyone who thought of the problems of hing will be able to supply y more.

William C. DeVane
Yale University.

Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of CEA will be held in conjunction with the Modern Language Association in Boston during the Christmas holidays. President De Vane announces the appointment of Professor Carl Weber of Colby College as Chairman of the Program Committee, and Professor Robert M. Gay of Simmons College as Chairman of the Committee on Local Arrangements. Suggestions from members as to meetings and as to papers and discussions should be sent direct to these chairmen.

New England Group

The second meeting of the New England Section of the C.E.A. was held at Simmons College, Boston, April 19-20. The session proved very successful, the attendance ranging at different meetings between 90 and 125. Professor H. H. Scudder, University of New Hampshire, presided as acting president.

On Friday at 4:30, after a short business meeting, Professor George Sherburn, Harvard University, spoke on *Pope and His Methods of Poetry*. An informal dinner followed at which over ninety members sat down at small tables, adjourning at 7:30 to hear Professor I. A. Richards speak on *Semantics and Basic English*. The explanation of the origin of Basic and the demonstration of its use as a device in criticism introduced a long discussion, led by Professor Winthrop Tilly, University of Connecticut, who illustrated the use of Basic in freshman classes in composition.

The next morning, at a business meeting, the purposes of C. E. A. were discussed and the possible future of the *News Letter*. It was also decided to hold two meetings a year of the New England Section, the next being in December at the time of the national convention in Boston, and the second at the University of New Hampshire in the late spring. The acting officers were continued in office for another year: H. H. Scudder, President; Katherine Balderston, Vice-President; and Donald Brodine, Tufts College, Secretary-Treasurer; and the Advisory Committee: Ralph P. Boas, Wheaton College; Evelyn Boynton, Colby Junior College; James L. Brennan, College of the Holy Cross; Milton Ellis, University of Maine; R. M. Gay, Simmons College; Kenneth Murdock, Harvard University; F. A. Pottle, Yale University; Nathan Starr, Williams College; Randall Stewart, Brown University.

Then followed two lively round-table discussions, of the *English Literature Survey*, led by John Hurd, Dartmouth College, George M. Sneath, Boston University, and Katherine Balderston, Wellesley College, and of *Freshman English*, led by Ellsworth Barnard, Williams College, and Harold H. Blanchard, Tufts College. Forty attended the former and sixty, the latter. Howard R. Patch, Smith College, then presented a paper on *Thaucer and Youth*. The convention concluded with an informal luncheon.

It is perhaps of interest to note that, although those attending the meetings were strongly urged to join the national C.E.A., it was decided to continue the present plan of having no local dues, but to charge a registration fee of fifty cents. The general informality of the meetings and the meals was much commended, as was the idea of having no formal speeches at luncheon or dinner.

F. Wylie Sypher,
Chairman of the
Local Committee.

Reward Creation As Well as Research

The thrill of Archimedes, when upon the discovery of specific gravity he shouted Eureka, was far more intense than that of Keats when upon discovering Homer he stood silent upon a peak in Darien. The triumphs of research are always more vociferous than those of creation. Professor Robert T. Oliver of Bucknell University in an excellent paper read at the Eastern Public Speaking Conference on last March 29 commented on historians, who as a rule fail to note the effect of oratory on the history of the world. Might not the teachers of English be criticised for ignoring their students? Creation does not awaken the emotions that come to discoverers and to the world from research in experimental science, but for the young creation has a joy even though from college faculties and even from teachers of English it receives little of the recognition accorded to research.

In Renaissance education and for several centuries composition was the subject highly honored in all schools. Prose and poetry received the prizes of the secondary schools. Even for doctorates, which argued ability to teach, the emphasis was on the candidate's ability to explain and defend orally chosen theses. The candidate's discourse was not always on a point of research. When language itself became a university subject and when experimental sciences and history attained prominence in the early nineteenth century, the doctorate examination, which gave evidence of ability to teach and was to that extent an examination in the art

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Are We Monarchs of All We Survey?

Miss Mirrielees' communication about Survey Courses in the April issue of the *News Letter* raises more questions, pertinent and impertinent, than the wisest Department Heads can answer, even those Heads who have been personally conducting annual Beowulf-to-Meredith tours in their own crack express trains. The Survey Course in English literature for freshmen or sophomores has been with us so long now in one form or other that in most institutions it is nearly as sacrosanct as Freshman English and more regularly patterned, thanks to the unalterable character of chronology and the almost uniform inclusions or omissions of the textbook makers.

Ways and means may vary from college to college and from instructor to instructor, but we are all traveling the same familiar road, most of us on local trains that stop, if ever so briefly, at every flag station along the line. We may linger for only a few minutes at Ascham and Beddoes, but, when these stations are counted by the score and often present inviting waiting-rooms (to the conductors if not to the passengers), there is never enough time left to do more than swing the mighty doors of Chaucer and Pope and Browning —and be off again.

To change our figure to Keatsian metaphor, there is reason aplenty for the surprise and wonder in the wild and sleepy eyes of our students as they gaze at each other and at us, not when we point out the peaks of Darien but when we say with William Vaughn Moody: "There! We've killed off another poet today."

To give categorical answers to Miss Mirrielees' questions is doubtless presumptuous. Each of us has different answers and has perhaps given widely differing ones at various stages of our own careers as conductors. Right now I am disposed to treat very cavalierly all of the defense counsel's argument I have ever heard or read in behalf of the Survey Course. Once I listened attentively to all of them because they helped me to rationalize my own prejudices for historical perspective, all-inclusiveness, and breadth and finer accuracy of knowledge. Now I am emerging very literally from a winter of discontent, not because I have been doing a worse job than I did two, four, or ten years ago, not because my fellow-travelers are less alert and responsive than they were in the good old days. My return from a year's leave of absence may have something to do with my present slough of despond; or a Spring which is coming up Vermont ways with more than wonted slowness; or the hurried perusal of Adler's

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The rules laid down in any rhetoric text-book are good. They advise simplicity, clearness and directness. They try to warn against the intemperate use of adjectives, which is the commonest fault of the young writer.—GEORGE ADE.

Editorial

Among the many potent phrases which Theodore Roosevelt bequeathed to posterity one of the most effective and generally useful is "lunatic fringe." T. R. applied it to social and political movements; but surely every new "ism" in the realm of the creative arts has had its own lunatic fringe; and the average citizen finds it even harder to tell where lunacy leaves off and sanity begins. On which side of the line in painting stands Derain; in sculpture, Brancusi; in poetry, Gertrude Stein; in music, Szostokowicz? Perhaps the impossibility of answering this question about any extremist experiment within the decade or the quarter century of its publication is one of the facts which justify the attack upon college classrooms devoted solely to current literature.

Artists, whether they may be painters or poets, must utilize a set of symbols for the expression of emotional experience. They are forever finding that any set which has been long in use has become inadequate, and they seek for some new hieroglyphic. Once upon a time the painter who wished to convey his feeling of perfect peace and security painted cows reposing in the grateful shade of a tree with a pool of water close by. But after a time such symbols fail to perform their purpose. One observer sees the picture and thinks of the price of beef, and another, of condensed milk in contented cans. And the artist knows this and resents it; so he paints a calm, blue parallelepipedon resting securely upon three magenta triangles, and he says in spirit to his audience, "These express the artist's emotional experience of security and peace; and if you do not recognize that, it is your own fault; and why should I care anyhow?"

One can sympathize with the poet who becomes weary of old verse-patterns and old poetic figures, and can hardly blame him for a struggle to find new means of communication, even though the struggle drives him, and us, insane.

Each copy of this May issue is accompanied by a letter inviting the recipient to join the College English Association. This will be received alike by members and non-members. Members will please understand that it is a matter of convenience to fold these letters in with all papers, and they can put them to use by passing them along to any colleague who might be persuaded to join our organization. The signers of the letter were chosen more or less haphazardly from our present membership, care being taken only to see that all sections were represented, and every type of institution at the college level, and every grade of instruction. A proof of the letter was first submitted to each signer for alteration or approval.

This little sheet must continue to discover by a process of trial and error how it may best serve the interests of our members; hence the appearance of editorial devices and their later disappearance if they are not fed and watered by supporting correspondence. In the March issue a column of "personals" appeared, devoted largely to announcements of instructors available for teaching positions. The column attracted two inquiries, and one has apparently led to the employment of an advertiser. But no further personals have been sent in, and the column will reappear only when there is something legitimate to print. We refuse to follow in the footsteps of our great contemporary, the *London Times*, which stooped to fill its own "agony column" by spurious paragraphs written by its own staff.

One of our members has suggested that the *News Letter* might render a service by publishing notes, however brief, from members who have discovered, in current book or magazine, chapters or pages or paragraphs of particular value in classroom discussion or especially applicable to our teaching problems. As a first step in this direction your editor wishes to call the attention of any teacher of advanced composition to the final chapter in A. E. Milne's recent Autobiography. Perhaps it would be of still greater value to the teacher in a play-writing course or to the literature teacher who is discussing modern drama. The chapter is rich in quotable passages and presents with clarity and delightful whimsicality some of the problems of the author and especially of the playwright. There is sharp comment upon modern formlessness in verse and prose.

For the teacher who finds himself discussing sensationalism in the newspapers we commend you to those passages in Oswald Garrison Villard's "Fighting Years" which deal with William Randolph Hearst. The book is indexed.

Formal issues of The News Letter will appear in October, November and December of this year. Matters of importance arising during the summer will be communicated to members by multigraphed letter.

The editor's mail contains an invitation to the College English Association to be represented by a delegate at the "centennial observance" of the founding of Bridgewater Normal School, parent institution of the present teachers college at Bridgewater, Massachusetts. The celebration is to be held in connection with the commencement program on June 7. Such a delegate will be appointed by our President. The mail contains also a presentation copy of "The Fortunes of Victor Hugo in England," a 333-page volume, being No. 134 in the Columbia University studies in English and Comparative Literature.

My dear Editor:

If some one else has not already done so, may I draw the attention of *News Letter* readers to "Dover Beach Revisited," by Theodore Morrison, in the February *Harper's*—an article which should be required reading and also required rereading for all college teachers of English poetry? May I too suggest that mention by one reader to the rest of articles particularly useful or delightful for English teachers might well fill a small space in the *News Letter*? The finding of these articles should not be left to an already overworked editor. They would be, I should think, rather an exchange from reader to readers, with *The News Letter* as the convenient vehicle of exchange.

Yours sincerely,
Edith Ronald Mirrielees

Literary Experimentors

Dear Editor:

Last night I was dining with Margaret Widdemer and Charles Hanson Towne. As you know, we are all three veteran writers, we have lectured and taught at various colleges, and most readers and the kinder critics admit that we are poets. We have all been at times dragooned into serving as judges in college poetry contests, and we have all found that the great faults in much of the work submitted are lack of clarity, and a sometimes deliberate obscurity and artificiality. As a result of our discussion, I can safely say that we agreed that students must be taught that all good writing is based on clear, logical thinking and the use of words in their true, dictionary meanings. Obscurity in any writing, factual or imaginative, is a prime defect. Charlie Towne said that what every writer needed was "Faith, Hope and Clarity."

It is perfectly natural for young writers, and older ones, too, in the enthusiasm of creative work to be swept away by floods of words that one might describe as verbal freshets originating in vague, half formed ideas; but it is the task of the true writer to think over his impulsive utterances and to make them intelligible with no sacrifice of inspiration, vigor, or beauty, but the enhancement of all three.

Now, I have seen the rise and fall of a lot of so-called "schools" of poetry and prose. No matter how hopeless were their productions, there were always alleged critics to praise them as being "experimental." The truth is that we are all experimenting all the time, not always successfully, and there certainly is no sense in dignifying an "experiment" that was a failure from its inception. I remember that a painter, talking of some of the aberrations in art that excite passing interest, told me that many of them were the self-rejected "experiments" of the old masters.

Eager students are misled by the publicity given certain literary mystificators for inexcusably bad work. Because such work is taken seriously and extolled by highbrow critics who certainly ought to know better, some young writers proceed to imitate it, and its imitation is so easy! They think that it has deep significance because they hear it spoken of with awe and reverence by supposedly intelligent persons who are nose-led by the "authorities." But even those who talk about the stuff don't read it. It isn't being read, it won't be and it shouldn't be.

Some college authorities are greatly at fault in countenancing and even exalting purveyors of bad work, especially if they come from across the sea. One writer, an American expatriate, who for many years has lived abroad writing sheer nonsense, returned to this benighted land to be greeted with invitations to lecture at our colleges. I frankly told a professor at one of our great universities that this was shameful. His reply was, "Well, this writer is a great personality." I said, "Personality my eye! Here is someone who writes nonsense and you know it. What is the effect on your students? Either they will say, 'This must be great stuff, we must go and do likewise.' Or they will say cynically, 'Huh! you can get away with anything with the right publicity'." I can see nothing salutary in such episodes.

Sincerely yours,
Arthur Guiterman

Noblesse

The burning question - mark plainly see
But not the question. No writing on the wall
Spells out the riddle of the Mystery:
Patient I peer and peer; nothing at all
Libretto to the signature is set,
And when I would the Mystery indite
From my own heart by prayer, the prayer is met
With its own echoes from the vault of Night.

But sometimes from the starlight seems to sound
A Voice imperial that firmly asks
"And wilt thou of my followers be found
"Honorary? Doing my sacred tasks
"With this for thy reward—mindfulness?"
To whom imperially I answer—Yes!

A. E. Johnson,
Syracuse University

Are We Monarchs of All We Survey?

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How to Read a Book. Whatever the cause, I have been thinking dark thoughts and dreaming subversive dreams. The result is that we are going to scrap our Survey Course in favor of an intensive study of ten or a dozen Representative Men through whose works we can see the far-off events of more spacious days and perhaps some of the little fellows climbing up their legs.

But to return to Miss Mirrielees' questions. Like most of my colleagues I used to think the Survey Course served useful purposes — several of them — not always very clearly defined but useful, you know. Then was I blind, but now I see that it does not because:

1. The Survey Course is so much concerned with the historical woods that it never gives our students a chance to see the giant oaks one bit more clearly than the saplings.

2. The Survey Course is so all-inclusive that our students and often we ourselves get lost amid the brilliant and prodigal profusion of names, big and small, and have little time even for the best and most frequently anthologized moments of the best and happiest minds.

3. The kingdom of Culture is never won on the bloody field of facts and figures of speech but on the bloodier field of sustained struggle to get at the very heart's core of the Masters.

Even those of us who have never wittingly permitted our course to degenerate into biographical gossip feats and have never believed that 'knowing about is as good as knowing" must realize that unwittingly we have been forced to depart from our ideals by the inherent viciousness of the Survey System. How can even the best of the surveyors do aught else when the glories of six and seven hundred years must all be sung in one?

In the democracy of the American classroom every student may be a king — or a queen, but not even the most brilliant and promising English "Major" has any license to declare: "I am monarch of all we surveyed." Nor for that matter can we, into whose keeping have been intrusted the keys to the kingdom.

Jeremiah K. Durick,
Saint Michael's College.

—o—

Your queries concerning the freshman survey course prompt me to say in reply that the Beowulf to Meredith plan, with only a few pages of text devoted to each author, is not useful to undergraduates, accomplishes nothing but the rote learning of dates and names of authors and titles, and does not promote an interest in literature. It has the tremendous advantage, however, of being safe in its historical emphasis. And it is easy to teach for it does not have much chance to deal with the imponderables.

There are several alternative plans. One of these retains the chronological organization of the survey course, illustrates the important "periods," and limits itself to a few authors, chosen to represent as characteristically as possible (in type and content) a given age. It is obvious that such a course is an introduction to literature, not a history of it. Its chief purpose is to teach the student to read. To learn to read means to approach an understanding of one's self and of human nature. It means to develop taste; to discover and expand intellectual and emotional capacities; to think; to hear and see more keenly than before; and above all to feel. No mean job. We teachers of English will never fully succeed. But at least we can try. And the historical survey is not the method to employ.

The first administrative problem is to get a group of teachers to agree on the selections to be used. They should be few in number, but varied in type and point of view, and not too difficult in technique or too limited in appeal. They should illuminate the past and yet never lose contact with the present. They should as a group range over as much of human experience as possible. They should, in short, be literary masterpieces.

But supposing that such a list is finally devised, there is still the problem of the teacher. He must be as enthusiastic and at the same time as discriminating about Milton and puritanism as he is about H. G. Wells and sociology; he must understand Shakespeare both as an Elizabethan and as a Modern; he must be as excited about rhymes or an alien temperament as he is about his own particular brand of ethics; he must not fear romanticism; and he must be brave in the face of classicism. And in addition to all this he must be full of common sense.

How much easier it is to teach the history of writing than to teach literature! Is it any wonder that the Beowulf to Meredith plan still prevails?

John Hawley Roberts
Williams College.

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Survey Courses, Pro and Con

Miss Mirrielees' letter in your April issue raises some questions which were discussed at the meeting of the New England Section on April 20. It was quite evident to us that a movement exists to return to the old Survey of English Literature after many colleges had given it up or changed to a Types of Literature or Great Authors course. I was much interested in the reasons given for this reaction. Among these were,

1. That a sketch of the whole of English Literature, however inadequate, is almost a necessity for students before they begin work on their English major.

2. That our students are, in general, completely ignorant of the course of English literature and have developed practically no sense of time or of periods.

3. That the courses which have been substituted for the Survey have proved discontinuous or partial or in some way confusing to the student, or have left him without a sense of the general progress of thought in English literature over the five centuries usually covered.

Of course during the discussion very drastic criticism of the Survey was made, and its pretentiousness and superficiality were emphasized as well as the fact that it is often primarily historical rather than literary. Some of those who spoke, however, mentioned that its superficiality is easily exaggerated, that very few teachers attempt to deal with all the authors represented in the books described by Miss Mirrielees (that is, they use the books selectively), and that short specimens given in such a book are often better adapted for intensive reading than the thirty to forty pages by each author usually given in a Great Authors type of book. I understand that Dartmouth College is considering a two-year Survey and that Harvard is reviving the course. Some colleges make no attempt to cover the entire five centuries but arbitrarily conclude the course with Shakespeare or Dryden or Keats.

Miss Mirrielees asks whether such a course is useful to freshmen. I think it is not given very often nowadays to freshmen because it appears to have become almost a standard sophomore course. She asks what it is intended to accomplish. I have already indicated what some of us hope it accomplishes. She asks, "Does it promote an interest in literature among students?" I think the answer is that this depends upon the way it is taught. If I may give my personal opinion, the usual administration of such a course by means of lectures accompanied by discussion and quiz sections, the latter usually conducted by other instructors than the lecturers, is often open to the doubts which she so shrewdly raises. On the other hand, having given a Survey (though, I must admit, to upper college students) for years, giving all the lectures, holding all the recitations and reading all the papers and quizzes myself, I believe the thing can be done in such a way as to avoid most of the objections which she advances. Naturally, this method is impossible in classes of fifty to three hundred. My classes were seldom more than thirty to thirty-five.

No one can dare to be oracular about the Survey. I think, however, that the new set towards its revival is perhaps due to the counsel of despair. Our students appear to know less and less about the past, to have more and more meager knowledge of basic facts, and to have a slighter and slighter sense of the characteristics of past periods. Miss Mirrielees asks whether there is not danger of the Survey's leading students to believe that knowing about is as well as knowing. Yes, there certainly is, but that is true in all literature courses. I believe the Survey can be conducted in such a way as to make it stimulating and even provocative. It certainly cannot do what a period course or a course on one author can do, but in almost all of the colleges which reported at our meeting, it is looked upon either as a foundation for more intensive courses or is offered as an elective for students who have found that a lack of a general knowledge of English literature has proved a handicap.

Robert M. Gay,
Simmons College.

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Dear Editor:

As one who reads your *News Letter*, though not a member of your organization, I hope you'll let me say to Miss Mirrielees that many years ago, at Harvard, I took a survey course in English Literature (perhaps it was only a half course), designed for Freshmen primarily, and as I look back over the years I can see it now as one of the most helpful courses I ever encountered. Perhaps the chief reason for this was that the course was not conducted from a text book, by little inexperienced instructors fresh from the Ph.D. dehydration process. It was conducted by George Lyman Kittridge, Barrett Wendell, Dean Briggs and A. S. Hill. Harvard opened up on the Freshmen with its big guns (as every college should do), and I can still recall after more than 40 years how these men communicated to us their enthusiasm for the works they were talking about, so that a considerable number of us, at least, trotted over to the Library to read more for ourselves. Presumably we were asked for names and dates on the examination paper —I don't recall. What I do recall is Barrett Wendell twirling the gold pencil quite off his watch chain while he recited "Full Fathom Five," and A. S. Hill telling us that nobody is under any compulsion to like Meredith but if you do like him go ahead and defend him as you would your best girl. And I recall how scores of us bought *The Golden Treasury* on Dean Briggs' advice, and without effort absorbed England's loveliest lyrics into our memories. I don't think it is the pathos of distance which makes me recall this course with enthusiasm. I recall enough others with no enthusiasm at all. I think it is because, as Freshmen, we were subjected not to text books but to teachers, and teachers who had a love for the literature they were teaching and knew how to communicate it. The more I see of so-called "scholarship" in graduate English departments, the more I wonder how any normal Freshman survives a course given by a product of the system.

Walter Pritchard Eaton
Yale University.

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Graduate Faculty Dominance

To a veteran of undergraduate teaching the growing protest against graduate faculty dominance and the research complex is a hopeful sign. Certainly under five percent of our college majors plan to earn the doctor's degree. Yet too frequently the graduate faculty so dominates the policies of undergraduate courses in the English major that its curriculum stands like an inverted pyramid.

An illuminating instance of this strangle hold is the long neglect of American literature as an undergraduate subject. Those of us who graduated before 1930 know how few courses in our own literature were available. And despite a rapidly growing interest today among undergraduates that should be satisfied by adequately trained men, the graybeards continue to place infinitely more value on a mastery of Gothic, Old English, and Middle English than of American literature.

"What, you like to teach freshmen!" exclaimed the professor upon the rash confession of the graduate student. "Then," he continued pityingly, "you are not genuinely interested in research."

Surely one of the marvels of our day is the adaptability of instructors, who, trained as specialists in sterile research, go into our colleges and by the sheer force of a consuming interest in the undergraduate train themselves to become adequate, and frequently inspiring teachers.

The presidential addresses to M.L.A. in 1936 and 1937 stressed dangers confronting the principles for which the association stands. Both authors, however, failed to recognize that the traditionalism incasing the initiate invested with the doctor's hood is one of our most insidious enemies. If the seats of authority continue to be filled with recruits who worship erudition and research as ends, there will be revolution; for as state support becomes more necessary, the public will become more vociferous and more impatient. And revolution too often destroys the good with the bad.

About twenty years ago a text on higher education proposed that the need for adequate training of college teachers be met by developing a course for a doctor's degree in teaching to parallel the traditional degree in research. Since the authors of this proposal were members of the Yale chapter of the rival order of Education, the leaders within the Castle damned it with neglect. That some change is needed we who stress undergraduate teaching realize; and for the good of our profession we must work out a plan that will meet the need and satisfy those in power, that will steer clear of the Charybdis of research and the Scylla of methods. Not until the graduate school and the administration acknowledge our standing may we hope to win full academic and economic freedom.

Eric V. Sandin,
State Teachers College,
Duluth, Minn.

Literature Makes Men

It is not at all surprising that we hear that literature is on the defensive. Teachers of literature have been content to stand on their dignities and lament while our more aggressive neighbors have been urging their more tangible appeals. It is difficult for students to picture a diploma in literature against a framework of dollar bills. It is much easier to profess that they are studying for this profession or that vocation, even if the end is so fixed that there is scarcely time to look about along the way. It is embarrassing, in the face of such patent practicality, for some students to confess that they are studying literature merely in the hope of becoming men.

And yet we who teach literature know that there is nothing about it for which anyone need be apologetic. Rather, we know that literature can and does do many things to mold character and make men. We know and have known for long that literature makes contacts with life and living, with thought and feeling, with fact and thinking. We know it opens new vistas, and effects what Newman once called "enlargement of mind." We know, too, that literature is moral. It teaches conduct by the examples of multitudinous characters. It makes praise or condemnation imperative. There are heroes to love and villains to hate. No one who really reads can remain indifferent or unmoved.

Just as confidently do we know that literature develops good taste and critical independence. We can well agree that though Arnold's choice of "touchstones" might be open to debate his idea was thoroughly sound. We can build a standard, a basis for comparison, a gauge, a measuring stick if you will, to which and by which fresh readings may be related to what is admittedly good. For serious students of literature there is no need to wait for the catch word in the crowd before they applaud or censure. Neither is there reason to believe that students of literature will continue to be duped into the notion that all best sellers are necessarily good books. Ruskin has said, "Tell me what you like and I'll tell you what you are." Students of literature can show the world what they are by demanding good things to read.

Never before has literature had the opportunity of doing more good than right now. There are those who believe that our age is self-sufficient and self-contained. The generation lives by questionaires and statistics. Historical perspective seems distorted, outmoded, and useless. Literature, we frequently hear, ought, if it is to lay claim to any value at all, to reflect contemporary unrest and record the vernacular idiom of the moment. But again we teachers of literature know how precious the past is. We know that the past is our best guide. We know that no good literature has ever been written without deference to what has gone before. This is the reason why we hope that students will soon discover for themselves that old books are not necessarily out of date, whereas many new ones are.

All these facts we know to be true. Why are we silent about them? Do students and faculty at large know them equally well? We teachers of literature have opportunities which few other teachers have. Literature offers to its students values which are difficult to duplicate in any other field,—values which our present generation greatly needs. There is no need to talk of shifting ground to meet a challenge. To shift ground admits lack of confidence. But we do need to iterate and to reiterate what we can do for our students. We cannot afford to suffer contempt either from colleagues or students merely because we ourselves balk at declaring what to us may be platitudinous. Contrarily, at every opportunity and by whatever legitimate means at our disposal we must concern ourselves with proclaiming the purposes and benefits of the study of literature. What we so well know we must share with others. Young people are still idealistic. They can be surely won if the assurance that literature makes men be made with frequency and with conviction.

D. S. Mead,
The Pennsylvania
State College.

ContemporaryLiterature Once More

To the running debate on "Shall We Teach Contemporary Literature?" may I add my word in the affirmative?

I agree that courses in recent literature should not take the place of (1) detailed and searching study of two or more of the greatest authors, (2) surveys (as thorough as may be) of the significant periods, or (3) courses in criticism or aesthetics (if and when excellent instruction is available). Further I believe that a course in recent literature should be offered in the senior year, following broad studies in literature, history and philosophy.

But the failure to attempt some critical interpretation of significant books published in our time is an admission of incompetence and despair. Certainly there must be a considerable scattering of teachers whose training, judgment, and taste are sufficient to throw some light on the darkness visible which is supposed to shroud the pandemoniums of our times. And as certainly there are hosts of young persons who would find this gleam at least a preliminary guide to the selection, understanding and approximate evaluation of the seminal or characteristic books of the age.

To find these books the teacher needs perspective. "Contemporary Literature," therefore, must be interpreted in terms not of the last five years, but rather of the last fifty, and not of one country alone but at least of literature in the English language. This longer and broader view immediately disposes of the small fry in buckram.

To organize these books the teacher should develop some scheme of sequence or reference. Time order must be supplemented by some more selective plan. A grouping by tendencies (such as Brandes traced in "Main Currents of 19th Century Literature") would prove a useful pattern.

Since the course must start somewhere, Matthew Arnold and his basic critical assumptions (literary and social) might well serve as a point of departure. Post-Darwinian "scientific determinism" would next lead into the current of literary "naturalism" from Zola's "Tess," and Crane's "Maggie," to "An American Tragedy." From the philistine preoccupation with money and morals an escape will be found in Pater's aesthetics, reduced to absurdity in the paradox and pose of Oscar Wilde and his art for art (or for sensation). Direct repudiation of the "Victorian Compromise" is expressed by Butler and Maughan. A vitalistic philosophy tankerous volubility make it impossible to ignore Shaw. Conservatism, Fabian socialism, and can-tive reaction asserts itself in Ma-lock, Chesterton, and the New Hu-manists. But it is swamped by the War 1 and its sad literature of the unknown soldier. Poetry loses form in the shift to "free verse" and loses intelligibility in the dust of the Waste Land. Dujardin anticipates Freud, and novelists delve deeper into the subconscious (as neurotic) until we have "Strange Interlude," "The Sound and the Fury," and "Finnegan's Wake." Bright young men flay Main Street. The Jazz Age effervesces like gas in prohibition champagne. The bubbles burst. The marxians become literary (or vice versa). T. S. Eliot becomes royalist, catholic, and classicist. And with depression we all became sober. And that's a thumb-nail sketch of the cycle.

Miss Cather is right. Literature can't be "taught," but the basic forces shaping content and style can be discussed, and books characteristic of these forces, expressed in corresponding techniques, can be examined. Their relative excellence in their own fields becomes fairly obvious; and comparison with the classics will demonstrate more permanent values. (Compare "Tess" and "Antigone;" "Ulysses" and "The Odyssey;" "Mourning becomes Electra" and "the Orestia"). Further probing in the assumptions back of modern tendencies leads to the threshold of philosophy and religion. Indeed, "Testament of Beauty" takes us across.

Values? Let any student compare the wisdom of Theodore Dreiser and of Miss Cather. Dreiser says: "In short, I catch no meaning from all I have seen, and pass out as I came, confused and dismayed." But Miss Cather is neither confused nor abashed.

Although she decries courses in contemporary literature, I believe she will not object to my continued use of her "Death Comes for the Archbishop" for a moment of pause and peace — before the world explodes again in World War II.

William S. Ament,
Scripps College.

Basic English in Secondary Schools

It is a commonplace that we cannot teach people to read or to write satisfactorily unless we can at the same time teach them to think. Complaints that we are doing none of these things are not new. Aristotle in his day declared that the teaching the Schools gave to their pupils was ready but rough, because they thought they trained people by giving them the products of an art, not the art itself. It was, he said, as if a man should set up to teach an art of *obviating pain in the foot* and then — instead of teaching shoemaking — should just throw them a few pairs of shoes. He might have helped their poor feet but he wouldn't have taught them to be shoemakers.

It is still true that we will not teach the growing generation to think effectively with words by just throwing ready-made thoughts into them in sentences however well-made or by cobbling their gaping sentences for them however assiduously. Can we not instead find a way of making them see for themselves how thoughts are made in sentences and giving them the right practice in making, picking to pieces, and remaking the sentences — in seeing how they work and thereby how, too often, they do not?

The group who are working with the Committee on Communication at Harvard think that Basic English, used in certain ways, can help — that it can become an important instrument, and its use a contributing discipline, in teaching this *art of thinking with words* both reading and writing and equally listening and speaking.

Basic English was designed in the first place to be an international language. It is a language of 850 ordinary every-day English words, using normal English syntax, with which you can say anything — make as near an approximation as you please to the meaning of any sentence in complete English.

As an international language it provides that general medium of communication which, sooner or later, our planet as it becomes wiser will have to have. Its use as an instrument in the school work on English (complete English) of English speaking pupils seems a different thing. But its powers here come from the very same principles which give Basic English its astonishing covering power. The vocabulary of Basic consists briefly of the words most needed for explaining what the rest of the words in Complete English can say. Faced with any word not in the Basic list you have first to make in your mind what that word is doing there (as it comes in the sentence) and then of finding out how to say that — as nearly as you can — with words in the Basic list. This exercise does two things. It makes you consider the sentence you are to translate into Basic much more carefully than we usually do. You have to take it in its setting and be very much clearer than we usually are about just what it is doing or trying to do. As a rule you discover that it could mean several different things which in Basic would have to be said differently. Then you have to decide which of them you will make it say. If you can't decide that, then you will at least be abnormally clear about the different possibilities and how they are related to one another.

I suppose it is generally agreed that translation into and from another language, Latin or French or German, is an extraordinarily valuable training in interpretation. Without for a moment dissenting from that, I may perhaps mention some advantages which translation into Basic English possesses which may in part compensate for the obvious fact that it can only improve ability in the mother tongue. First, it is often easy to find in the other language some sentence which has, or is supposed to have, very much the same ambiguity (but it is better to call it resourcefulness) as the English. If so, translation will not necessarily make anything clearer. The translator may find the right version without learning anything about what the English means or may mean. Secondly, translation into Basic — unless the original happens to be very nearly in Basic already — allows very little mechanical substitution of word for word equivalents. You have constantly to recast the form of the sentence and seek for analytic or metaphoric modes of expression. As an exercise it supplies the syntax at the same time that it heightens the power of comparing meanings.

The third point is that, the fewer the words you have in a translation medium, such as Basic, the more you must make them do if you are to get adequate versions with them, and at the same time the evident demonstrable risks of being viciously ambiguous will be greater. Thus Basic is a very testing exercise in lucidity of exposition.

The fourth point is perhaps still more important. Basic, being so limited, can rarely pretend to get all the meaning of the original. You have to recognize that any *one* Basic version will get only a part of it and you must choose *which* part that is to be. More than that, translation into Basic makes you abnormally aware that the parts of the total meaning of a passage are not all of the same kind. Suppose we separate these parts (or components) into the Sense, the Feeling, the Tone (attitude to audience) and Intention, or effects aimed at, of the Utterance.

Basic can handle the Sense — what the sentence says — as a rule very well. It is conspicuously less happy, though not helpless, with the other components or functions or modes of meaning. The result is that a Basic translator gains a peculiarly lively practical awareness of the differences and the interdependencies of these modes of meaning. And this, for the conduct of interpretation and expression alike, is clearly a most desirable thing.

I. A. Richards,
Harvard University.

Reward Creation As Well As Research

(Continued from Page 1)

of teaching, underwent a profound change. The advancing of knowledge took the place of the imparting of knowledge. Science supplanted art.

It is now possible to gain a doctorate, supposed to be ability to teach, from any subject at all upon which new or newly discovered information can be amassed. The ability to express oneself and the evidence of teaching powers, which may be found as well in creation, receive no academic honors today to equal the rewards formerly bestowed upon authors.

If the colleges and universities will not honor, as they once did, the writers of essays, of stories, of plays, of speeches, of all types of verse and prose, why should not the C. E. A. give public recognition to the students who furnish evidence of the power and the art of composition? The establishing of due standards of excellence offers indeed a difficulty, but even should some be honored who are not quite original geniuses, the proportion of duds, if I may call them such, need not be higher than the scarcely audible report made by some of our Doctors of Philosophy. The honor of a degree might well be accorded to college graduates who give evidence that they can write and speak English as a result of their college career. What say you, C. E. A.?

Francis P. Donnelly,
Fordham University

Training of Secondary Teachers

Dear Editor:

The Maine State conference of college teachers of English, a yearly meeting which antedates the College English Association section meeting by about eleven years, at its session at Bates College, Lewiston, on April 19, discussed and unanimously adopted the following resolution.

> The Maine State conference of college teachers of English places itself on record as deploring any further extension of the requirements in education for the certification of secondary-school teachers.
>
> If any change is to be made, we urge a reduction of the present requirements.

A delegation from the University of Maine which was going on to attend the New England meeting at Simmons College was instructed to present the resolution for consideration at that meeting; but in my absence it was overlooked at the business meeting Saturday morning. I presented the subject briefly at the English Survey round table without requesting any action. At the Freshman English round table, however, it was unanimously approved.

I am forwarding this note to you for any notice which you may wish to give it in the next *News Letter*.

Sincerely yours,
Milton Ellis,
Univeristy of Maine

What a Young Composition Teacher Should Know

Dr. Creek's request for a training formula for teachers of composition should not be left unanswered. Perhaps these modest proposals will help. The prospective comprof should have:

(1) No. Ph.D. and no intent to get it. The method of study, the sort of information acquired, the psychological effects (tension, introversion, distorted view of life, and probable monocarpism) unfit one to teach freshmen and elementary composition.

(2) One or two years of work on a small newspaper. College courses may teach one to write 1,000-word themes, but only newspaper work will train one to cut this verbiage in half.

(3) A good reading knowledge of the great masterpieces of literature of all countries. This is at present difficult to secure in regular college courses, because they are usually concerned with only the big fish of little periods, the weak links in "evolutionary" chains, books (ordinary) about books (immortal), and mere nibbles at the great long classics.

(4) A small amount of magazine publication, enough to make him conscious of diverse editorial requirements, enough to indicate to his students that teacher too can write.

(5) A course in pedagogy, one in logic, one in philosophy, one in the history of the language. Nothing in excess here—or elsewhere.

W. L. Werner,
Pennsylvania State College.

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A. J. M. Smith
Michigan State College.

Three Cheers

"If Literature has a place among the fine arts it must be so taught; criticism leading to trained enjoyment and keener appreciation must have first place . . . "

So reads in part an editorial in the *News Letter* for March, 1940. I heartily agree with the writer. I hope he will agree with my contention that the study to recommend for second place, at least, is the study of the English language.

By that I do not mean a course in the history of the language, a course which demands a knowledge of Old and of Middle English. I mean, on the contrary, a course which will acquaint undergraduates with some of the factors that have changed and are still changing our language; a course which will give students some background for deciding questions of present-day usage and pronunciation.

Let me illustrate. The February issue of Word Study, published by the G. & C. Merriam Company, reprints an ironical editorial from the *New York Times* on the fact that "Birmingham-Southern College proposes to grant diplomas only to those candidates for graduation who use English properly." The writer then adds: "In this land of liberty, for a century and a half, the collegian has been privileged to say 'ain't,' and 'those kind of teams,' and 'that kind of a touchdown,' and 'They were given three cheers,' and 'It looks like it was going to rain,' like any one else."

The editorial writer seems to class "They were given three cheers" with more unacceptable expressions. I suppose he would have us write instead, "Three cheers were given (for) them." He might say that "They were given three cheers" is illogical. Or he might fall back on the rules of grammar and assert that if we try to diagram the sentence "They were given three cheers," we would run into difficulty: we would find that "three cheers" would not go any place except on the "object-line" and a passive verb cannot take an object.

Word Study probably is widely read, and statements by New York editorial writers will influence many. However, a student who has had even an elementary course in present-day English might do some investigating before he condemned "They were given three cheers."

If he referred to *English Usage* by J. Lesslie Hall, he would see that Hall names thirty-eight writers—from Hugh Latimer to Holmes—who used sentences of this type in which there is a "retained object" with a passive verb. Hall also gives a list containing forty other writers—from Richard Rolle de Hampole to Stevenson—compiled by Lounsbury; and these also have used the retained object with the passive. Hall calls this retained object a striking feature of the English language and adds: "It was evolved by our language centuries ago and is deeply imbedded in colloquial, platform, and written English."

In addition, E. A. Cross (*Fundamentals of English*) names other scholars, including Jespersen and Kittredge, who also defend this usage. George O. Curme (*Syntax*), who gives an account of the development of the construction, says that we find the accusative of the active retained in the passive as early as the thirteenth century.

Maurice Hicklin,
Humboldt State College

An Incomplete Experiment

During the summer, the English Department of Loyola College, Baltimore, decided to regard itself as a group working rather in literature than in English or any one language. Thus, in the stiff reading program we were preparing, we could assign, for examples, Lawrence of Arabia's translation of the Odyssey, the story of David from the Old Testament, the Nibelungelied. Experience, we feel had taught us that, to secure respectable English from college freshmen, even if that were the only aim, the best means were three: to lead them to read the great stories of the world, to read, where possible, with appreciation of rhythm and sound values and to awaken an interest in the ordinary people and things around them by constant themes based on observation. We decided that our job was not to bewail the material sent us from high schools and that remedial courses as such were, quite definitely "out," that the better time to remind graduates of twelve years of previous training of commas or spelling was after an interesting theme, not before.

At the end of April, a questionnaire developed the following responses from the students. A heavy majority claimed that grammar had been improved more through the reading program than through formal instruction. A majority again insisted that the required nature of the reading had not killed enjoyment. The most gratifying indication of the program's measure of success lay in the reports that a goodly number had started a personal home library, that books had been recommended by fellow students, that reading over and above that required had been done. The tentative choices offered of "most profitable," "most enjoyable," were individualistic and interesting.

Hugh McCarron, S. J.
Loyola College

Indiana Teachers Affiliate with CEA

The Indiana College English Association meeting at DePauw University on May 11 voted to affiliate with the College English Association, retaining its complete autonomy, however. This relationship would make it possible for college English instructors in Indiana to belong to the regional group without membership in the national association. An interlocking directorate, and a strong sentiment in favor of membership in both organizations should result in close relationship during a trial year. Professor Herbert L. Creek of Purdue University, a director of CEA, is president of the Indiana association.

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